



**ST. JOSEPH'S
HISTORIC FOUNDATION**

**804 FAYETTEVILLE ST.
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA**

**"...Where all past years are."
John Donne**

FOR NEARLY NINETY YEARS, the unique steeple of St. Joseph's African Methodist Episcopal Church has been a landmark on the skyline of Durham, North Carolina.

Today, the church has become transformed into a secular building, it is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and in its new role as St. Joseph's Historic Foundation, Inc., gives promise of becoming an equally important landmark in the city's cultural life.

WHAT'S PAST IS PROLOGUE

St. Joseph's Church, a handsome Gothic Revival building designed by Philadelphia architect Samuel L. Leary, is a dramatic symbol of historic and social change.

The congregation was founded in 1869 by Edian D. Markham, a former slave who settled in Durham. Rev. Markham had seen his mother driven in chains to the auction block through the streets of Elizabeth City, North Carolina.

On the site of the present building, Rev. Markham began preaching in a bush arbor, while his congregation sat on boxes and home-made stools. Later a log church was built, followed by two frame buildings. When this brick church of 1891 was planned, the congregational name was changed from Union Bethel to St. Joseph's.

It was the people in St. Joseph's church that gave it quality. There was John Merrick, a founder of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, which has filled an inspirational and social role for the black race at home and abroad. There was John M. Avery, an executive in the same firm, a great Methodist layman, and active in boys' club work. There was W. G. Pearson, a leader in black education in the state and the first cashier of Mechanics

and Farmers Bank (a National Landmark in downtown Durham), which was one of the cornerstones of black capitalism in America. There were Richard B. Fitzgerald, first president of Mechanics and Farmers, and Dr. Stanford L. Warren, a Durham physician whose name is commemorated in the second-oldest black library in the state.

These men, and many women—among them Mrs. Markham who lived in Durham until 1941—built the church that earned Booker T. Washington's praise.

From the beginning of this building, the church was of interest to Durham's white community. Contributions to the structure were made by Washington Duke, patriarch of the family business that became the American Tobacco Company; by General Julian Shakespeare Carr, the advertising genius who plastered the picture of Bull Durham all over the world; by W. T. Blackwell, an early owner of the Bull Durham firm; and Mrs. Eugene Morehead, whose husband organized the city's first bank in 1878. Bricks for the building were fired in the local Fitzgerald Brick Yards.

The 350 seat sanctuary's pressed tin ceiling is ornamented with green diamond-shaped mouldings and embellished with gold; the brass chandeliers are fitted for both gas and electricity; and the stained glass and painted windows are very good examples of work done in the period.

They include a portrait of Washington Duke, a Victorian female black angel, and a memorial to Julian Shakespear Carr, which depicts a suppliant figure containing some raised glass for a slight three dimensional effect. Railings and panelling are of simulated chestnut. A sweet-tone organ, with blue-green pipes touched with gold, was added later, as was a religious education wing for the building honoring the name of Rev. Markham.

ACT IN THE LIVING PRESENT

In March, 1976, St. Joseph's church, oldest ecclesiastical building in Durham which a decade earlier had been headquarters for local civil rights demonstrations, was closed when its congregation moved to a modern building.

Vandals went after the Victorian windows and bulldozers were virtually poised to demolish the edifice. Then the building was saved for posterity when it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. In two public meetings, St. Joseph's Historic Foundation was formed, with a biracial board and leadership—Aylene Cooke (Mrs. R. B.), and J. J. Henderson, a retired executive of North Carolina Mutual, as co-chairman. A total of \$165,000 was received to restore the building; \$155,000 from the City of Durham's Community Development Program (in a series of four unanimous City Council votes), and \$10,000 from the National Park Service.

With these funds, the building's interior has been rehabilitated. The roof and ceiling were repaired after extensive water damage, and ceiling colors were faithfully restored. Seventy-five percent of the rough, sand-finished plaster was replaced. Plexiglass exterior shields were placed at the windows, new wainscoting was installed on two walls, the original sanctuary floor was refinished, a new red oak flooring was laid in the narthex, and new outside doors acquired.

The only departures from the original structure are a theatrical lighting system, new wiring, fire rated walls and ceilings, and a ramp planned for the handicapped at the back of the building.

By the fall of 1977 interior restoration of St. Joseph's was completed. The Foundation launched an ambitious campaign to raise funds for the exterior restoration work.

AND SERVE THE FUTURE HOUR.

The revitalized St. Joseph's Historic Foundation building now is the shell for a new living organism—The St. Joseph's Performance Center, which was used and enjoyed by thousands of people during its first year of operation.

It has two resident performing companies—The Ebony Dance Theatre, which uses a specially-created practice studio in the building; and the Pocket Theatre, which gave approximately 80 theatrical performances in its initial season.

Early tenants of St. Joseph's Performance Center also include a photographer-teacher who will be building a community photo archive; a film corporation that makes movies for non-profit and governmental agencies; and a non-profit publishing enterprise. The building will also house art classes, concerts, lectures, and film performances; and serve as a work and meeting place for community groups.

St. Joseph's is open to the public for modest maintenance fees. It will, however, require financial support from the community to develop and continue the dynamic programs in the arts which have been envisioned.

When church founder John Merrick lifted the collection in the early years at St. Joseph's it was his custom to say:

"Brothers and sisters, if you don't put some money on this table today, we'll just have to stop doing business here on this spot."

In the spirit of John Merrick, we earnestly request that you support the development of St. Joseph's Performance Center by contributions to the St. Joseph's Historic Foundation.

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Tax Exempt Status

St. Joseph's Historic Foundation is tax exempt under section 501(C)(3) and contributions to the Foundation are tax deductible.

*"In all my traveling, I have never seen a finer
Negro church than St. Joseph's."*

—Booker T. Washington